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RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 9314
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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000589

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[1](#)1. Mideast

[1](#)2. Iran

Key stories in the media:

The media reported that at a Labor Party forum on Wednesday Defense

Minister Ehud Barak hinted that fighting in Gaza may again flare up.

He was quoted as saying: "We will see worse things before we reach the next stage of the calm." All media reported that on Wednesday evening an anti-terrorist unit of Israel Police killed four wanted Islamic Jihad activists from Bethlehem, including the group's leaders in the city, senior militant Mahmoud Shehada. Shehada had sent the car bomb that killed the daughter of then National Religious Party chairman Yitzhak Levy in Jerusalem in November 2000.

Major media reported that overnight Islamic Jihad launched Qassam rockets at the western Negev.

Ha'aretz reported that tension between Jerusalem and Washington is intensifying over Israel's foot dragging in the removal of roadblocks and outposts in the West Bank. The Americans are complaining that Israel is not keeping its promises to improve the day-to-day life of West Bank Palestinians. Ha'aretz quoted a senior Israeli official said Friday's scheduled tripartite meeting could be difficult, as Gen. Fraser is expected to present a report of Roadmap violations likely to be critical of Israel. On the other hand, the official noted, the Palestinians can expect criticism over last week's terror attack in Jerusalem and other issues related to the war on terror. "Real tension has developed with the Americans, and if there are no steps on the ground we will find ourselves in big trouble," the Israeli source was quoted as saying. He added that in the eyes of the Americans and of other members of the international community, a "gap has developed between the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on the core issues and events on the ground." The Jerusalem Post quoted senior GOI officials as saying on Wednesday that Israel is bracing for what is reported to be a "skewed" report from Fraser on Israeli and Palestinian implementation of Roadmap obligations. Ha'aretz reported that on Wednesday Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice spoke again about violations of the road map, specifically mentioning that Israel's recent announcements of new construction plans in East Jerusalem and the West Bank were "unhelpful" to the peace process. Ha'aretz reported that Tony Blair is also unhappy about Israel's activities on the West Bank and its failure to take steps to improve Palestinian civilian life. He was quoted as saying as much to Ehud Barak during their meeting on Wednesday. Ha'aretz reported that while Blair is still optimistic about his mission, many of the projects he is championing face obstacles, largely due to opposition from the Israeli military establishment.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Defense Ministry Director-General Pinhas Buchris will travel to the U.S. next week to try to interest the Pentagon in the Israeli-developed Iron Dome missile defense system and to explore procuring the Skyguard laser system to protect Sderot from Qassam rockets. The Jerusalem Post and Makor Rishon-Hatzofe cited the Defense Ministry's belief that Iron Dome is better than the Nautilus system.

Israel Radio quoted FM Tzipi Livni as saying in a speech at Harvard University that the decision to allow construction in the settlements did not help the negotiations with the Palestinians, but that these were private construction plans and not of great consequence. Livni noted that the GOIQs policy was not to expand settlements, and added that in a peace agreement, Israel would be asked to dismantle more settlements. The radio reported that Livni spoke on the phone to Republican presidential candidate Senator John McCain and Democratic presidential contender Senator Hillary Clinton.

All media highlighted the spectacular fall of the U.S. dollar against the shekel.

Leading media reported that on Wednesday street notices posted by a group of rabbis identified with the extreme right called on Jews to avenge their enemies "measure for measure." Israel Radio reported that the terrorist who killed eight yeshiva students last week was quietly buried last night. Major media reported that the police have started to check whether it is possible to raze the terrorist's house. The media quoted Internal Security Minister Avi Dichter as saying that he wants the house demolished.

Mel Levine, one of Senator Barack Obama's closest advisors and a former congressman from Los Angeles, was quoted as saying in an interview with The Jerusalem Post that Obama would be great for Israel.

Leading media reported that on Wednesday dozens of demonstrators shouting that Israel should be wiped off the map protested against President Shimon Peres' visit to Lyon, France,

Yediot ran a feature about the growing dissent among young Israeli Arabs.

Ha'aretz and The Jerusalem Post reported that on Wednesday senior Foreign Ministry officials denied any decision to boycott the Qatari-based Aljazeera-TV due to biased coverage. Earlier on Wednesday Deputy Foreign Minister Majalli Whbee told IDF Radio that the ministry had decided to embargo the station, which he accused of "untrustworthy reports" and of incitement to terror. The media quoted Walid al-Omari, Aljazeera-TV's bureau chief in Israel, as saying that he had received no official notice from the Foreign Ministry and accused Israel of trying to intimidate the station. He was quoted as saying that Israel "speaks of democracy but persecutes the media and restricts its freedom of speech and movement."

Major media reported that two policemen from Ma'aleh Adumim are suspected of abusing a Palestinian detainee.

Yediot reported that early this week, in his testimony in the libel suit against him, Israeli-Arab film director Muhammad Bakri admitted that "Jenin, Jenin," his controversial movie about Operation Defensive Shield, received funding from then PA culture minister Yasser Abed Rabbo. Bakri added however, that the PA did not influence the film's content.

Yediot and Ha'aretz reported that Microsoft has acquired the Ramat-Gan start-up Kidaro for \$80 million.

1. Mideast:

Summary:

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Israel and the Palestinians will not reach a proper implementation agreement under a timetable that has been determined for a political reason -- the Bush administration's reason."

Military correspondent Amos Harel and Palestinian affairs correspondent Avi Issacharoff wrote on page one of Ha'aretz: "Israel apparently does not have the time or space to accept Palestinian mistakes in the West Bank."

Military correspondent Amir Rappaport wrote on page one of the popular, pluralist Maariv: "When the current security situation is examined at a time when there is still talk of calm, one can understand the great cause for concern."

Block Quotes:

1. "The Three Whiners"

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (3/13): "[Roadmap monitor Lt. Gen. William] Fraser will sit down at the table with a pair of whiners whose strength is in their weakness. This one is not doing enough, that one is not doing enough. This one says he cannot, the other says he is unable. The time may have come, after so many years, to insist -- with both parties. Let the Palestinians build their institutions, let them prove they can fight terror, let them dismantle the militias and find a way to neutralize Hamas. Let Israel find the strength to remove outposts, restrain its coalition partners and meet its obligations. This will not be a pleasant process for either the Israelis or Palestinians, but contrary to what is usually thought, the two whiners are not what prevents the necessary choice of such a path. The problem is actually with the third whiner, the Americans. Because such insistence on fulfilling all obligations will include the painful recognition of a fact the U.S. administration is not prepared for: Israel and the Palestinians will not reach a proper implementation agreement under a timetable

that has been determined for a political reason -- the Bush administration's reason."

II. "Little Room for Mistakes"

Military correspondent Amos Harel and Palestinian affairs correspondent Avi Issacharoff wrote on page one of Ha'aretz (3/13): "The fragile, indirect agreement the Egyptians brokered between Israel and Hamas over Gaza will meet its first test today. The killings on Wednesday of five wanted militants by the Israel Police's anti-terrorism unit, in two incidents on the West Bank, is likely to spur Islamic Jihad into attempting retaliatory rocket attacks from Gaza into the Negev. It seems we've been here many times before.... Hamas is demanding that the cease-fire include an

Israeli commitment, in the long term, to stop arresting terror suspects in the West Bank. Hamas's leader in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh, raised the demand on Wednesday just a few hours before the incident in Bethlehem. Israel rejects the demand out of fear it would give the terror organizations a free pass to plan attacks. The fight against terror in the West Bank is constant. When it leads to Palestinian casualties it can have immediate effects on events in Gaza. Until Wednesday Hamas seemed to be imposing its will for a lull on the other factions in the Strip. But Islamic Jihad, to which four of the five militants killed Wednesday belonged, has very different interests. Iran, which controls Islamic Jihad with an iron hand and has significant influence over Hamas, apparently wants a renewed escalation of the conflict.... Wednesday's police operation dealt a blow to the PA's efforts to bolster its military status. But Israel apparently does not have the time or space to accept Palestinian mistakes in the West Bank. Every missed opportunity, intentional or not, in the PA's war against West Bank terror could end in another terror attack in Jerusalem."

III. "Danger on Three Fronts"

Military correspondent Amir Rappaport wrote on page one of the popular, pluralist Maariv (3/13): "When the current security situation is examined at a time when there is still talk of calm, one can understand the great cause for concern.... In practice, the understanding for calm is very fragile from the outset.... Hamas ostensibly won when it forced the IDF, as part of the agreement, to halt its operations inside the Gaza Strip as it had demanded for months, in exchange for Hamas stopping the rocket fire. But Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh made another demand last night for Israel to also stop its operations against wanted men in Judea and Samaria. He soon received a firm answer: Wednesday's operations in Bethlehem and the village Saida illustrate that from Israel's standpoint no understanding -- whether it exists officially or not -- applies in Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank].... The security establishment does not rule out the possibility that the terror attack at the Mercaz Harav Yeshiva and additional terror attacks that are liable to originate in Judea and Samaria could be linked to ' sleeper cells ' set up in the territories by Hizbullah's 1800 unit -- which is responsible for operating Palestinian terror.... The security establishment is certain that Hizbullah, with the help of Iran, is making supreme efforts to carry out ' quality ' terror attacks against Israeli targets in Israel and abroad. A painful terror attack could lead to a sharp reaction on Israel's part, which could very quickly deteriorate into another war with Hizbullah.... Israel is becoming increasingly concerned about the Iranian project for developing a non-conventional warhead, which they would be able to install on a cruise missile that could strike any place in Israel. The fear of this threat is particularly great since the defensive measures that have been developed by Israel so far against surface-to-surface missiles such as the Shihab -- the Arrow missiles that intercept any enemy missile at an altitude of several dozen kilometers -- are not effective against a missile cruising towards Israel at a low altitude."

12. Iran:

Summary:

Defense commentator Amir Oren wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The closer their political time comes to running out, the more opposition to Bush and Cheney's hostile policies toward Iran they encounter within their own security establishment."

Columnist Calev Ben-David wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "Clearly, the Bush administration prefers that Iran believes the U.S. presence sitting right on its doorstep is less a reasonable fox, and much more a big bad wolf."

Block Quotes:

II. "One Admiral Too Many"

Defense commentator Amir Oren wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (3/13): "The closer their political time comes to running out, the more opposition to Bush and Cheney's hostile policies toward Iran they encounter within their own security establishment.... [Admiral William] Fallon, who enjoyed the role of the voice of wisdom and dialogue in contrast to Bush and Cheney's saber-rattling, was one admiral too many.... Just last week, Fallon testified before Congress about Iran and its damaging activities in Iraq, Lebanon and Gaza. The words were belligerent Bush style, but it was Fallon's placatory music, because the dispute is not about the diagnosis, but rather the treatment. Fallon also fell out with his subordinate, General David Petraeus, the commander of the forces in Iraq, and Petraeus, who turned failure into success, however relative, is the darling of Bush and McCain. Whoever falls out with them is seen as indirectly assisting the Democrats. The Democrats are happy to lean on Fallon, but in line for practical politics as a senior retired officer is General Wesley Clark, who wanted to run but failed and became a Clinton supporter."

II. "The Message that Fallon's Farewell and Cheney's Arrival Sends to Tehran"

Columnist Calev Ben-David wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (3/13): "Sending Dick Cheney to the region is certainly one way of rattling both the sabers and the Iranian cage -- as is removing from the scene the U.S. military commander [Admiral William Fallon] who reassured Esquire, and the rest of the world, 'I am the reasonable one,' when it comes to Iran. Clearly, the Bush administration prefers that Iran believes the U.S. presence sitting right on its doorstep is less a reasonable fox, and much more a big bad wolf."

JONES